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# To the *Supervisors* of the Department

## From the Director of Personnel..



### PUBLIC SERVICE AND COMMUNICATIONS

The purpose of this communication is to make suggestions that will increase the effectiveness of Administration. The "Letter Appraisal Chart" on page 3 and the "Box Score on Telephone Habits" on page 4 can be used in establishing standards applicable to local conditions.

The Department of Agriculture exists to serve the Public. That is the only reason it exists.

The Department's business is conducted through oral and written communications.

Our service to the Public is measured by the quality of our communications including how we handle correspondence, how we handle telephone calls, and how we treat callers.

This poses a continuing problem and satisfactory results can be obtained by giving continuing attention to these matters.

In the final analysis, the responsibility for insuring that employees are courteous and helpful to the public must rest with the supervisor.

Some of the things that can be done, by those responsible in each office, to assure the highest type of service through communications are:

#### I. CORRESPONDENCE

1. Personally assume or assign responsibility for giving continuous leadership to improvement of the handling of correspondence.
2. Make periodic surveys or a check to assure that prompt and effective methods are being used and that quality is being maintained.
3. Assure special handling and assembly of information when communication involves more than one agency.
4. Hold periodic "letter clinics" on improvement of letter writing by appraising individually and in group discussions actual letters that have been sent.
5. Use systems designed for the orderly control of correspondence when justified by large volume of inquiries, the answers to which can be somewhat standardized.

6. Limit formal clearances but use reader copy to inform others needing information in replies.
7. Speed the handling of correspondence by:
  - a. Delegating authority to prepare and sign and get correspondence into "out boxes" quickly.
  - b. Arranging messenger and mail pickups to meet dispatch schedules.
  - c. Special handling of high priority correspondence.
  - d. Alternate arrangements for handling mail of persons away from their post of duty.
  - e. Acknowledging letters promptly when time is needed to prepare a complete reply.
  - f. Establishing time limits for various types of correspondence.
  - g. Using correspondence units when justified by numerous inquiries of a type which a special correspondent can answer.
  - h. The use of the Department and Agency Correspondence Style Manuals.

## II. TELEPHONES

8. Keep employees who meet or directly serve the public posted on the work of their own and other agencies about whose functions they are likely to get frequent inquiries.
9. Practice Courtesy. Answer promptly, identify yourself when answering, speak pleasantly, show interest, be as helpful as possible, make sure referrals are made to the right person, go out of your way to assure good service, offer to call back or have someone else call back if you aren't sure about an inquiry (don't take a chance), jot down requests or promises so they won't be forgotten.

## III. TRAINING

10. Whenever feasible, standards should be established for handling correspondence, phone calls and visitors--with employees in the office participating in their development.
11. Attention should be given to the obligation to be courteous, pleasant and helpful; in orientation and other training activities, in performance rating discussions, in the selection of persons for positions involving public contacts, and in day to day supervision.
12. Available Training material should be utilized in emphasizing the importance of these objectives and in helping employees understand their responsibilities.

The following two pages are reprinted from the U.S.D.A. publication "Guide Posts for Supervisors" (Guide No. 10, 'Communications' Pages (7) "Letter Appraisal Chart" and (11) "Box Score on Telephone Habits." They also appeared in other U.S.D.A. Training material such as "Writing Effective U.S.D.A. Letters" and "Telephone Manners."

This Chart is reproduced from a series of U.S.D.A. booklets on letter writing. It is certainly a key device in checking our letters:

**CAN YOU ANSWER "YES" TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS?**

IS THE LETTER:

1. COMPLETE
  - a. Does it give all information necessary to accomplish its purpose?
  - b. Does it answer fully all the questions, asked or implied, in the incoming letter?
2. CONCISE
  - a. Does the letter include only the essential facts?
  - b. Are the ideas expressed in the fewest words consistent with clearness, completeness, and courtesy; have irrelevant details and unnecessary repetition been eliminated?
3. CLEAR
  - a. Is the language adapted to the vocabulary of the addressee?
  - b. Do the words exactly express the thought?
  - c. Is the sentence structure clear?
  - d. Is each paragraph one complete thought unit?
  - e. Are the paragraphs arranged in proper sequence; are the ideas presented in the most effective order?
4. CORRECT
  - a. Is the accuracy of all factual information beyond question?
  - b. Are all statements in strict conformity with policies?
  - c. Is the letter free from: (1) grammatical errors, (2) spelling errors, (3) misleading punctuation?
5. APPROPRIATE IN TONE
  - a. Is the tone calculated to bring about the desired response?
  - b. Is the letter free from antagonistic words or phrases?
  - c. Is it free from hackneyed or stilted phrases which may amuse or irritate the addressee?
  - d. Does the entire letter evidence a desire to cooperate fully?
6. NEAT AND WELL SET UP  
 Will a favorable first impression be created by: (1) freedom from strikeouts and obvious erasures; (2) even typing; (3) position of letters on the page?

**HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE LETTER AS A WHOLE?**

To what extent is the letter likely to accomplish its purpose, obtain the desired response, and build good will? In other words, how do you rate its general effectiveness? Underline the word which best expresses your rating:

OUTSTANDING \* GOOD \* PASSABLE \* UNSATISFACTORY

**IN RATING ANOTHER'S LETTER:**

If the letter is "unsatisfactory," be sure to indicate the specific weaknesses which necessitate revision. Similarly, if the letter is only "passable," indicate clearly the weaknesses to which attention should be given in future letters.





## BOX SCORE ON TELEPHONE HABITS

Do you hit home runs, or do you foul and strike out occasionally in your daily telephone relations with the public and with your fellow employees? Spot your weak points on this Box Score, and then check with the suggestions set forth in the previous pages for tips on telephoning techniques.

**HOW:** Put a check for each question in whichever column to the right under the heading **HOME RUN**, **BASE HIT**, **FOUL BALL**, or **STRIKE OUT**, best fits your answer to the question.

## DO I REGULARLY:



### *Promptness*

Answer before the second ring?  
Return promptly calls received in my absence?



### Identification

**Answer** by identifying myself or my office, not by “hello”?

### *The run-around*

Give caller the information he wants or, if unable to do so, transfer him directly to the person who can? Instead of transferring calls to others who might also pass the buck, get the information and call back?



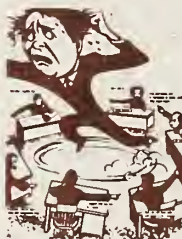
*Courtesy*

Avoid such abrupt phrases as "Who's calling?"  
Use such polite phrases as "Please," "Thank you," "I'm sorry?"  
Definitely close calls with "Goodbye," or similar phrase?



### Voice impression

Sound interested, awake, helpful, friendly, pleasant?  
 Speak distinctly so as to be clearly understood?  
 Sound like a member of a human and businesslike office?



HOME RUN

BASE HIT

FOUL BALL

STRIKE OUT

“y”?

**HOW TO FIND YOUR SCORE:** Add up checks in each column to get **TOTALS**. Multiply each total by number beneath. Then add up the **RESULTS** to get your **SCORE**. How do you rate? Over 90—**BIG LEAGUE**. 80-90—**BUSH LEAGUE**. 70-80—**SAND LOT**.

TOTALS	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>
MULTIPLIERS				
RESULTS	—	—	—	—
SCORE	—			

LOT. Below 70—BENCHED.

LEARN--PRACTICE WHAT YOU LEARN